NEWS

Crow is Pure Stock champ

By **DAILY NEWS** | |
PUBLISHED: October 15, 2006 at 12:00 am | UPDATED: August 29, 2017 at 2:55 am

IRWINDALE – Rick Crow wasn't planning on entering every race in the NASCAR Pure Stock division at Irwindale Speedway. He was only going to do a few, take it easy for a change at the race track.

He was more concerned about coaching his kids' basketball and T-ball teams. He wanted to watch his daughter in band competitions. A veteran driver who raced at Saugus Speedway and Irwindale Speedway for decades, Crow said he wanted to spend more time with his family and less time at the race track.

When he blew a motor in practice before one of the races in April, it was no big deal. He would have time to fix it and bring it out again another weekend.

But it rained. The night's races were washed out. Crow said he got lucky. He would have to miss a race, but it wouldn't cost him in the standings.

"At that point, there was no way to stop," said Crow, a driver from Simi Valley who won the Pure Stock track championship at Irwindale Speedway. "I made a deal with my family. If I stayed in the top five, I'd keep racing."

Jeff Elder, a driver from Redlands, was one of only two drivers to beat Crow all year in the NASCAR Pure Stock division at Irwindale Speedway.

In one of the last races, Elder came in third, but he heard his wife from the stands yell, "It's like you finished second!"

Crow had won again, his 10th of the year. He would add another by the end of the year, finish with 11, and win the Pure Stock track championship in commanding fashion.

"Coming in third feels like you accomplished something," Elder said.

Crow won 11 of 14 races in the Pure Stock division, including nine in a row to end the season. The Pure Stock division races on the half-mile oval and figure 8s. Neither mattered to Crow; he won on both: eight on the oval and three figure 8s.

"He outclassed us," said Harry Michaelian, who finished second in points in the Pure Stock division. "As a competitor, he's the most experienced of us all. It's hard for the rest of us to keep up."

There is also a rule in the Pure Stock division that puts the winner of a race in the rear to start the next race. Crow had to do that eight times in the past nine races – and won every time.

"Racing against Rick, that guy's a stud," Elder said.

Crow had a pretty dominating year in the Pure Stock class. But it's not like he didn't try to improve the caliber of the drivers he raced against. He went out of his way to improve the drivers and their cars.

Michaelian, a champion driver from the Orange Show in San Bernardino, said Crow was especially helpful in the figure 8 races.

Michaelian, a Cal State Northridge graduate who lives in Lawndale, said he never had to set up his car, a 1973 Road Runner, to turn right. He always raced on ovals and all he knew how to do was set up his car to race in circles.

"He came to me," said Michaelian. "He was very sincere as far as his help to me."

Taking time to help other drivers was something Crow learned early in his racing career.

"When I started racing, there was always guys who would share with you," Crow

At one point in the season, Crow said he tried to trade cars with any driver. He especially wanted to drive Elder's 1976 Chevy Nova. But no one was willing to switch and Crow raced his same pink 1972 Chevelle all season.

One of the writers at the track named Crow's car the Pink Panther this year and the name stuck. But Crow has driven pink race cars since 1989, the year his mother died of breast cancer.

Pink was his mother's favorite color. After his mother died, Crow decided to paint his race car pink in memory of her. Crow later discovered that pink is also the color for breast cancer awareness.

He kept the color and said he gets a great response at the track, especially from fans who have beaten breast cancer or have friends who are fighting breast cancer.

Crow has owned this particular car for only two years. He plans on returning for another season of racing in it in 2007, but this past year is one Crow won't soon forget.

"This is the kind of season you dream about in any division," Crow said. "The things I'm most proud of: The guys in that division got better every week, and knowing that I won every one of my main events from last place made it rewarding. It's a great rule. I had a blast."

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